

Country Lodge

IT WAS the funniest thing I ever saw!"

"What was?" asked the Old Tiler of the New Brother.

"That lodge meeting I attended in Hicksville. Listen, and I'll tell you!"

"I'm listening, Anyone who can find a lodge meeting funny deserves to be listened to!" answered the Old Tiler.

"The lodge room was funny!" began the New Brother. "Lodge rooms ought to have leather-covered furniture and electric lights, a handsome painting in the east, an organ – be dignified, like ours. This lodge room was over the post office. There were two stoves in it. And every now and then the Junior Deacon put coal on! The Lesser Lights were kerosene lamps, and the Altar looked like an overgrown soap box! The benches were just chairs, and they didn't have any lantern or slides - just an old chart to point to in the lecture.

"But it wasn't so much the room, it was the way they did their work. You'd have thought they were legislating for a world, not just having a lodge meeting. Such preciseness, such slow walking, such making every move and sign as if they were a drill team. There wasn't a smile cracked the whole evening and even when at refreshment, there wasn't much talking or laughing. I'm glad I belong to a lodge where people are human!"

"Yes," answered the Old Tiler, "I expect it is."

"Expect what is?"

"Impossible for a New Brother to understand the work of a country lodge," answered the Old Tiler. "What you saw wasn't funny. Listen - it is you who are funny."

"Me funny? Why, what do . . ."

"I said for you to listen!" sternly cut in the Old Tiler. "I have never been to Hicksville, but I have visited in many country lodges and your description is accurate. But your interpretation is damnable!"

"Masonry is beautiful, truthful, philosophical, strives to draw men closer to God, to make them love their fellows, to be better men. Is that funny? The more regard men have for outward symbols, the more apt they are to have regard for what is within. A man who won't clean his face and hands won't have a clean heart and mind. A man who is slovenly in dress is apt to be slovenly in his heart. A lodge which reveres the work probably reveres the meaning behind the work.

"You criticize the Hicksville Lodge because it is too precise. Would that our own was more so! The officers who have so deep a regard for appearances can only have learned it through a thoughtful appreciation of what the appearances stand for.

"You have been taught that it is not the externals but the internals which mark the man and Mason. What difference can it make whether a lodge seats its membership on leather benches or chairs, or the floor, or doesn't seat them at all? Our ancient brethren, so we are taught, met on hills and in valleys. Think you that they sat upon leather benches, or the grass?

"It's good to have a fine hall to meet in. It's a joy to have an organ and electric lights and a stereopticon to show handsome slides. But all of these are merely easy ways of teaching the Masonic lesson. Doubtless Lincoln would have enjoyed electric lights to study by, instead of firelight. Doubtless he would have learned a little more in the same time had he had more books and better facilities. But he learned enough to make him live forever.

"We teach in a handsome hall, with beautiful accessories. If we teach as well as the poor country lodge with its chairs for benches, its kerosene lamps for Lesser Lights, its harmonium for organ, its chart for lantern slides, we can congratulate ourselves. When we look at the little lodge with its humble equipment, thank the Great Architect that there is so grand a system of philosophy, with so universal an appeal, as to make men content to study and practice it, regardless of external conditions.

"I do not know Hicksville Lodge, but it would be in even bet that they saved up money to get better lodge furniture and spent it to send some sick brother South or West, or to provide an education for the orphans of some brother who couldn't do it for his children. In a country lodge you will get a sandwich and a cup of coffee after the meeting, in place of the elaborate banquet you may eat in the city; in the country lodge you will find few dress suits and not often a fine orator, but you will also find a Masonic spirit, a feeling of genuine brotherly regard, which is too often absent in the larger, richer, city lodge.

"I find nothing 'funny' in the dignity and the seriousness of our country brethren. I find nothing of humor in poverty, nor anything but sweet Masonic service in the junior Deacon putting coal on the fire. Would that we had a few brethren as serious, to put coal upon our Masonic fires, to warm us all."

"You've put coals of fire on my head!" answered the New Brother; "I deserved a kicking and got off with a lecture. I'm going back to Hicksville Lodge next week and tell them what they taught me through you."

"If you won't expect me to laugh, I'll go with you!" answered the Old Tiler, but his eyes smiled.